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## PLAYHOUSES AND PRIMITIVE HOMES

HATTIE A. WALKER

The morning exercise on houses was the result of experience gained through the study of providing shelter under varied conditions. After the children had described their own homes and others which they had seen in travels or in books, the environment of the tree man was made vivid by blackboard drawings and stories of forests and animals. The cave man's surroundings of cliffs and rocks were presented in the same way. The background of the Indian and his wigwam was made clear



*First Grade Houses*

by means of stereopticon views of plains and mountains. The setting for the Eskimo and his home was made more realistic through descriptions of Arctic country and climate.

After the children had studied some of the ways and means of making homes, they went one day to the woods, and while there they made a brush house. When they returned, some of the children wished to make another brush house in the playground, others suggested digging caves, and still others wanted to build a brick house. Since a portion of the garden was given to them for their own use, they were able during their play period to carry out the plans that they had suggested.

In making the brick house, the children used old bricks at first, and then others were bought. They dug the sand from a neighboring lot for mortar. In laying the bricks there was constant practice in making surfaces level and straight. Judgments had to be made as to the size of bricks and as to the quantity of cement used; also the amount of water necessary to make the cement. The problem of making the cement stick was worked out by experimenting, by observing bricklaying, and by questioning people who understood the work. The children found out that when all conditions were met, the brick-



*Brush House*

laying was well done, but if any condition was neglected, the results were poor.

The problem of the cave men, as the young diggers called themselves, was to get their cave deep enough and still prevent the top from falling in. An ingenious man, however, would frequently put boards over his excavation and cover them with dirt, or if he succeeded in making a tunnel only six inches in length from one cave to another he was wild with delight, and felt that he had been successful. One child who was very self-centered wished to work alone in his cave. His cave grew deeper, and the earth harder, and the work more difficult until one day he saw a pickax in the tool shed, and using it, found what a help it was to him. Then he went around and helped the other cave men and saw how much more two could do than one. Soon after this he came in from work and said, "I have taken a partner." There were times when these cave men threw stone and dirt like their forefathers, but gradually there grew a spirit of co-operation, and the right feeling came about without outside influence.

The difficulties found in making the wigwam and the snow house were clearly presented by the children in the following exercise:

#### HOUSES<sup>1</sup>

*Teacher.* For four years the children of the first grade have been making houses out in the woods and in the garden, and this morning they are going to tell you something about their work. The older children, who

<sup>1</sup>The children chose the particular work they wished to talk about, and through their choice they naturally divided themselves into groups. When the exercise was given, the stereopticon pictures of the different types of shelter were thrown upon a screen, and as these pictures appeared, every group in turn went up and sat upon the floor of the platform. Each child then stood and told of his part in the work, and when all the group had finished, they again took their seats in the audience.

have been in the first grade and have done this work, will also tell you of their experiences.

*Ruth (third grade).* When the third grade were in the first grade, they went out into the woods on an excursion and came to a place where some vines were hanging from some trees in the shape of a nice little house, but on one side there were no vines, so we thought we would bring some leaves and make a nice house of it. We began doing it, and we pretended it was going to rain, and we must work faster. We did work a little faster, and after a while, when it was almost done, it did begin to rain, and we crowded into the house.

*Caroline (third grade).* When we came home we thought we would make a brush house in the garden. We brought the brush from where the flat building is now standing. When that was all taken away, we brought more brush from an old tree that had fallen down in front of the school. When it was all done a hard rain came and knocked the roof off.

*Elizabeth G. (second grade).* When we were in the first grade, we went to Glencoe and found a brush house that the third grade had made when they were in the first grade, and we thought we would fill up the cracks. So we went out into the woods and found leaves and sticks and brought them back and put them into the cracks. We found vines and wove them between the cracks, and when it was finished we thought it nice and cosy.

*Robert B. (second grade—pointing to a drawing in crayon on the board).* I drew this picture. Here is Mr. Mortensen and a few children. The rest of the children have gone to get their lunch, and Miss Walker and I are behind this tree. Mr. Mortensen built the fire, and the children are sitting around it eating and making believe they are Indians. The reason that we could not have a fire in the brush house was because we would burn it.

*Robert H. (second grade).* When we came back from Glencoe, we thought we would make a brush house in the garden. After Christmas we gathered up all the evergreen trees used for the Christmas decorations and stuck them in the ground. Then we took vines and wove them in and made a green house.

*Mary (first grade).* This year the first grade made a brush house, and we wove into it cornstalks and sunflower stalks and morning glory vines, and sometimes used cord and string. But the goats would run through it and break it down.

*Charles (first grade).* The first of this year we were talking about a man and the kind of a place he could live in without using tools to build it. We thought he might live in a tree or in a cave. We thought it would be too hard for us to make a tree-house, so we made a cave. After we had worked a long time, I put my shovel down, and it went right through into the girls' cave, and we dug as hard as we could, and now we can go through.

*Ward (first grade—holding up a ruler and measuring off the inches).* The boys' cave is three feet and eighteen inches long, and the width of it is twenty-six inches. The widest place is one foot twenty-three inches, and the depth is sixteen inches.

*Philip (first grade).* I wanted to start a little cave, so I started, and I struck something hard, and I thought it was a big rock, and then I thought it was ice, and I called all the boys to help me get it out, and Jack

threw in a shovel like a pickax, and we found that it was only frozen earth.

*Margaret (first grade).* When I was digging in the cave I saw a little toad in its hole, and just as I was trying to get him he hopped into the garden, and when he ran in I thought perhaps he would make a home there and stay until winter was over.

*Roberta (first grade).* Does anybody know whether there are any real cave men now?

*Herman (eighth grade.)* Yes, there are, in Africa.

*Margaret (fourth grade).* When the fourth grade were in the first grade they made a wigwam. They made it out of brown cotton flannel, and sewed it together with brown thread. They pretended that the pieces of brown cotton flannel were skins and that the thread was sinew. Then we took three poles and fastened them together and set them up in the garden. We took the brown cotton flannel and put it around the poles and left an opening for a door and a little hole at the top, so that we could have a fire in the wigwam, and the smoke could go out at the top.

*Lisette (third grade).* First, we made a clear space in the room to put the material on the floor, and when we cut it out we found that there were some little pieces missing down at the bottom, and so we fitted in scraps. We went to the Field Museum, and we saw Indian wigwams there that had pictures on them. The pictures told the dreams of the Indians. A bow and arrow meant that they had dreamed of hunting. When we went home we thought it would be nice if we could make some pictures on our wigwams, so we painted pictures with bright colors. It was near Christmas, and our teacher thought it would be nice to make little Indian wigwams for Christmas presents. They were penwipers and they had pictures on them. Mine had stars, and a moon and some arrows on it. The stars and the moon meant that I had had a dream, and the arrows meant that I had been hunting.

*René (fourth grade).* One day when the fourth grade were in the first grade, we had on our Indian suits and were out in the garden sitting around a fire, eating parched corn. We got the corn out of our garden and parched it in the domestic-science room. While we were eating the corn we told stories. (*In the exercise, a typical story was told.*)

*Peggy (third grade).* When the wigwam was finished, we wanted some mats to sit on. We found some long grass, but as we could not weave it very well, it took quite a while to make mats big enough to sit on.

*Allen (fifth grade).* When I was in the first grade, we were studying houses, and some of us suggested making different kinds of houses. We talked about the kind of things our houses were made of, and one of us suggested making a brick house. First, we measured off the ground where we wanted the house, and then we dug a little ditch around the sides. In this we laid the bricks which served as a foundation. When we got it done, we found that it was not on our land, so we had to tear it down. We used bricks that had been left from building the school.

*Caroline (third grade).* When we were in the first grade we started to build the second brick house. We had the bricks from the old one to play with, and we pretended the bricks were blocks, but somebody knocked down the walls we made, and we told our teacher, and she said, "It is your own fault, because you did not build it strong enough." And then we thought we

would have to use mortar. We used three cups of cement, and four of sand, and enough water to make it thick.

*Ruth (third grade).* I measured the second brick house, and it is 7' 8½" long and 7' 5" wide. The window is 1' 8" wide.

*Elizabeth G. (second grade).* Last year I helped to lay the brick floor. We leveled the ground, and then we put on sand and laid the bricks. After the floor was laid, we put down a board and placed the level upon it, and if the bubble was in the middle of the level, the floor was even. There were many cracks between the bricks, and we filled these with sand, and then cemented the floor.



*Brick House*

*Philip (first grade).* Sometimes we laid one brick a day, sometimes two, sometimes three, and sometimes four. We worked hard on it. It takes a day and a half for a brick to dry. Sometimes when we have just laid a brick the children come around and knock it off, and sometimes the goats come through the window and walk on the wall and knock a brick off, too, and that makes more work.

*Oehm (first grade).* One morning we went out and found that a part of the brick house was broken down, and Leone and Jack and I stayed after school and all of us worked at recesses on the house, but it took a long time to mend the broken place. Then it was broken down a second time, and if it hadn't been broken down so many places we would have been building the roof now.

*Elizabeth S. (second grade).* I used to go out for about an hour after school and work on the brick house, and there were others in the group who worked, too. We had to soak the bricks in water over night; otherwise, in the morning, the cement would not stick. It took us a long time to find out what was the matter, and finally we thought we should try soaking the bricks, because if we did not do this the water in the cement would go into the bricks and leave the cement dry and crumbly.

*Roberta (first grade).* When we came to school in the fall we found that the brick house was too high to reach to the top of the wall, and we had to find high boxes to stand on, and it was not easy to climb up on

them, and when we climbed upon them it was hard to carry the bricks and the sand and the cement and the water, and then we had to mix the cement up there. We found one box with sides about as thick as a cigar box, and we cut it into strips about four inches wide and about a foot long, and we used them for trowels.

*Warren (second grade).* When we were in the first grade we thought we would build a snow house, and so we rolled big snow balls that high on me (*holding his hand at his waist line*), about two feet, and we put them one on top of the other until they were above my head—about 4 feet. But we could not make a roof, and so we got a big sheet and spread it over for a roof, and we went in and had a lot of fun.

*Robert S. (second grade).* Last year, when we were in the first grade, we made a snow house, and we had trouble. First, it melted down; then we tried it again, and it melted again; then when it was colder, we tried again. We rolled snow balls until they were almost up to my shoulder, and began the walls of our house. Then we rolled others, but we found we could not have them so large, because we could not lift the big ones on top of the others. This year we thought it would be fun to have a party for the first grade, so we built a snow house over in the park, and all of us played Eskimo games.

*Ward (first grade).* This year we thought it would be lots of fun to build a snow house. We rolled big snow balls in our own yard and used up all the snow. Then we had to go into the garden, and we rolled one big snow ball about three feet high, and we could not lift it. So Miss Reed and I rolled it over to the house, and we called a lot of boys, and they helped to lift it up, and we had to pack it in so it would not roll off the wall. I wore the Eskimo suit and pretended I was Boaz, the Eskimo boy.